

CY 70-15



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20591

April 3, 1970

A70-15

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

Honorable John H. Shaffer  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
Department of Transportation  
Washington, D. C. 20590

Dear Mr. Shaffer:

The Board recently received a report of an in-flight turbulence incident involving United Air Lines Flight 236, a Boeing 720, which occurred on July 26, 1969, near Janesville, Wisconsin. Six persons were reported injured, one of whom was subsequently hospitalized with serious injuries.

The report from our Chicago Field Office discloses that the seat-belt signs had been turned on approximately 5 minutes prior to encountering turbulence. No verbal announcement was made at the time the signs were turned on. The captain of Flight 236 stated that no announcement was made because turbulence was not anticipated and that he turned the signs on as a precautionary measure.

At the time of the incident, the seriously injured passenger was in the lavatory with her 2-year old daughter. This passenger had occupied the left aisle seat in the front row of the tourist section. She stated that she was unaware of the lighted seatbelt signs at the time she left her seat because she was unable to see any sign from that seat location.

Recently, an almost identical report was received from our Seattle office involving a United Air Lines Douglas DC-8 on August 6, 1968, near New Richmond, Wisconsin. This report disclosed that the seatbelt sign had been turned on by the crew 28 minutes prior to the turbulence encounter but that no verbal announcement was made. Two passengers, including an infant, were seriously injured and four passengers received minor injuries as a result. The occupants of seats R4 and R5 stated that they could not see a seatbelt sign from their position and, consequently, were not aware that fastening was required. Our investigator

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reported that the sign is not visible from the mentioned seats for persons of less than average height. The Board is also of the opinion that the installation of the subject sign is not in accordance with section 121.317(a) of the Federal Aviation Regulations in that a seatbelt sign was not visible from the positions these passengers occupied.

In view of the above, the Board recommends the following: (1) that the Federal Aviation Administration amend Part 121 of the Federal Aviation Regulations to require that any time "fasten seatbelt" signs are turned on in flight, the crew make a verbal announcement over the public address system to advise the passengers of that fact; (2) that the Federal Aviation Administration canvass all carriers, subject to the provisions of section 121.317(a), with a view toward assuring readily visible warning signs at all seating positions in air carrier aircraft.

The staff of our Bureau of Aviation Safety will be pleased to provide you with any further information or assistance you may desire.

Sincerely yours,

  
John H. Reed  
Chairman